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Foreign Training of Nicaraguan Students

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Summary

Since the Sandinistas took power in 1979, we estimate that up to 15,000 Nicaraguan youths have received educational scholarships to study in Soviet Bloc countries, including Cuba. While Nicaragua is having trouble filling scholarship slots, we believe the number of students going to Communist nations each year has remained relatively stable. Most students pursue technical studies, such as agricultural engineering, but military and intelligence instruction also is provided. The reintegration into Nicaraguan society of these students, particularly those trained in Soviet Bloc universities, apparently is not progressing smoothly. Some returnees are expressing frustration over the scarcity of good jobs. [REDACTED]

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Background

Extensive assistance from Moscow and its East European allies has bolstered Sandinista efforts to educate and indoctrinate the Nicaraguan populace. In addition to providing textbooks and equipment for use in Nicaraguan schools, the Soviet Union, East Germany, and Bulgaria have provided Nicaraguan undergraduate and post-graduate students six-year scholarships for study abroad. Under the terms of a 1980 educational cooperation agreement between Moscow and Managua, the host government picks up the tab for the training, and possibly transportation, of these students. Managua also signed similar agreements with Yugoslavia and Hungary in 1985. [REDACTED]

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Cuba sent many teachers to Nicaragua immediately following the Sandinista Revolution, but the number has declined markedly in recent years. In late 1979, for example, over 1,000 Cuban teachers traveled to Nicaragua to assist in a nationwide literacy campaign. Such activity peaked in the early 1980s when some 2,500 Cuban teachers were working in Nicaragua. Since the mid-1980s, however, the number of volunteer teachers from Cuba working in Nicaragua has dwindled to a handful. [REDACTED]

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The Number of Students Abroad

Approximately 15,000 Nicaraguan students have studied in Communist countries since the 1979 Revolution. University level students go primarily to the Soviet Union and East European countries, especially East Germany. Based on US Embassy reporting, we estimate that nearly 4,500 university students have studied in the Soviet Union since 1980; some 1,700 presently are studying there. Over the same time frame, approximately 2,000 students have studied in Eastern Europe, with some 800 currently enrolled in various programs. US Embassy reports indicate that several thousand vocational students also are studying in Eastern Europe. [REDACTED]

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Although the data are incomplete, the number of scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students provided by the Soviets and their Eastern European allies appears to have grown gradually over the past several years, primarily because of an increase in undergraduate slots. Sandinista officials, for example, claim that the number of undergraduate scholarships offered in the Soviet bloc increased some 25 percent--from 400 to 500--between 1985 and 1986. They further claim that the number of annual post-graduate scholarships remained steady at approximately 150, however. Reporting from the US Embassy in Managua earlier this year suggests that the total 1988 scholarship allotment for study in the USSR and Eastern Europe will remain at the 1987 level. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Cuban training of Nicaraguan students appears to concentrate on secondary school students. Based on US Embassy reports, we believe that as many as 6,000-8,000 Nicaraguan youths have studied in Cuba since the early 1980s. An estimated 2,000 are currently receiving training in Cuba. The majority of these are housed on the Isle of Youth, Castro's educational showcase for Third World students. [REDACTED]

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Type of Training Received

Most Nicaraguan students abroad receive technical training. For example, the 1986 scholarship list published in Nicaraguan newspapers is heavily weighted towards disciplines with practical applications: agriculture (108 openings), food and fishing industries (41), textile production (21), and mining and geological prospecting (50). Only ten scholarships on the list were for the arts. Advanced training in such specialized fields as medicine also is available. The US Embassy in Managua, however, says that, in addition to professional studies, each student receives continuous indoctrination in Marxism-Leninism.

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Selection of Students

Within Nicaragua, competition for scholarship slots is tightly controlled by the ruling party. The Sandinistas use foreign scholarships to reward loyalty, and a student's political leanings often are more important than his intellectual capabilities or academic qualifications. According to US Embassy sources, applicants must present letters of reference from pro-regime mass organizations substantiating their "correct" political credentials. For the past several years, press reports indicate demobilized Army troops have had first priority for undergraduate scholarships. More recently, the US Embassy speculates that laid-off government employees will be given special consideration in filling overseas training slots. [REDACTED]

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Recruitment Woes

Over the past several years the regime has encountered some difficulty in filling its slots for scholarships, according to US Embassy reports. Popular antipathy toward Cuba and the Soviet Union, which probably has grown in recent years, may be partly to blame for the shortfall. Moreover, some wealthy parents send their children to school in other Central American countries or the United States. We believe, however, that the regime has filled its quotas with lesser-qualified students, thus keeping the pipeline full. [REDACTED]

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Problems For Returnees

The track record of foreign-trained students returning to Nicaragua is mixed. According to US Embassy reporting, teachers and other technical/vocational trainees have done relatively well. Many, especially teachers, have succeeded in obtaining mid-level government jobs. The reintegration of university-trained students into Nicaraguan society has proven more problematic, however. US Embassy sources say some are having difficulty finding employment even though they were reportedly promised government posts in their areas of expertise. Others are frustrated because their education does not quite "fit" Nicaraguan needs. [REDACTED]

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While the ability of opposition groups to capitalize on the returnees' discontent in the near term remains uncertain, the frustration of foreign-trained students will cause longer-range problems for the Sandinistas. The training they received probably makes many of them more likely to emigrate than to rally to the opposition cause. However, friction between domestic- and foreign-trained cadre--who despite their current woes seem likely to eventually dominate the bureaucracy--appears certain to complicate the regime's internal decisionmaking process. The latter, for example, are likely to strongly urge adoption of classic Marxist solutions to deal with mounting economic woes. [REDACTED]

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